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SUBJECT: (SBU) Secretary Rice's Meeting with Colombian
Prosecutor General Mario Iguaran

¶1. (U) January 25, 2008; 2:15 p.m.; Medellin, Colombia.

¶2. (SBU) Participants:

United States
The Secretary
Ambassador William R. Brownfield
Representative Melissa Bean
Representative Eliot Engel
Representative Jane Harman
Representative Alcee Hastings
Representative Ron Klein
Representative Rick Larsen
Representative Solomon Ortiz
Representative Ed Perlmutter
Representative David Scott
A/S Jeffrey Bergner, H
A/S Sean McCormack, PA
A/S Thomas Shannon, WHA
A/S Daniel Sullivan, EEB
S Chief of Staff Brian Gunderson
Director of House Affairs Scott Kamins
Deputy Executive Secretary Kevin Whitaker
Adam Lenert, Embassy Notetaker

COLOMBIA
Attorney General Mario Iguaran
Ambassador Carolina Barco
Minister of Social Protection Diego Palacio Betancourt
Vice Minister of Labor Andres Palacios
Director of International Relations for the Attorney
General's Office Francisco Echeverri
Justice and Peace Unit Director Luis Gonzalez
Human Rights Unit Acting Director Carlos Alberto Camargo
MFA U.S. and Canada Coordinator Patricia Cortes
Witness Protection Unit Director Gilberto Martinez
Private Secretary to the Prosecutor General Luz Elena
Morales

¶3. (SBU) SUMMARY. Prosecutor General Iguaran detailed his office's progress on combating impunity in cases of labor violence. He described the creation of a special labor sub-unit with a team of prosecutors and investigators dedicated to union cases, and reported that the unit achieved convictions in 27 cases in 2007. Iguaran recounted his office's efforts to investigate extrajudicial killings and underscored progress in obtaining information on human rights cases through the Justice and Peace Law process. The Secretary thanked him for the significant efforts made by his office. END SUMMARY.

FISCALIA COMMITTED TO ADVANCING LABOR CASES

¶4. (SBU) Colombian Prosecutor General Mario Iguaran told Secretary Rice and the congressional delegation of progress in Colombia's efforts to prosecute perpetrators of violence against labor leaders. Iguaran, though nominated and approved by the Congress, runs the Prosecutor General's Office (Fiscalia) independently from the executive and judicial branches.

¶5. (SBU) Iguaran said he regretted Colombia's poor record on achieving convictions in cases of violence against unionists, but emphasized that the Fiscalia has committed to reversing that trend. He had dedicated significant resources and manpower to tackling those cases. The Fiscalia had created a special sub-unit for labor cases, staffed with 13 prosecutors and 77 investigators. In 2008, the Colombian government will increase the prosecutors in the Human Rights Unit, which includes the labor team, from 45 to more than 100. It will also raise the budget for the Human Rights and Justice and Peace units by more than USD 40 million.

IMPORTANT PROGRESS ALREADY ACHIEVED

¶6. (SBU) Iguaran underscored the progress made by the Fiscalia so far, noting that 59 cases had already been prosecuted, with 126 criminals sent to prison. He explained that the courts found that many cases of alleged violence had motives un-related to the victims' union affiliation. Typical motives in these cases included

common crime, personal conflicts, and violence between illegal armed groups. Still, Iguaran acknowledged that some cases of targeted violence did have links to union affiliation and vowed to prosecute the perpetrators.

¶7. (SBU) Iguaran explained that paramilitary confessions in the Justice and Peace Law { which encouraged paramilitaries to demobilize and confess their crimes in exchange for reduced sentences { have produced a wealth of information on crimes against unionists and other human rights abuses. He added that these confessions gave the Fiscalia information about many cases that previously had no leads, and also implicated others in the crimes. "Although it is imperfect, this process has finally allowed for a system of justice and reparations to

victims," Iguaran observed. The demobilization of paramilitary members has also created greater security and contributed to the substantial decrease in unionist murders.

PROSECUTING PERPETRATORS OF EXTRA-JUDICIAL KILLINGS

¶8. (SBU) Representative Scott asked Iguaran to respond to criticisms by Human Rights Watch that Colombian military officials had a role in extrajudicial killings. Iguaran responded that some unfortunate incidents of military involvement had occurred, but stressed that the Fiscalia set up a special unit to investigate these cases and prosecutes perpetrators to the full extent of the law. Authorities have arrested 69 members of the military implicated in such crimes so far, and the Fiscalia has already brought seven of those cases to trial.

U.S. SUPPORT VITAL TO CONTINUING PROGRESS

¶9. (SBU) In response to Members of Congress' questions on labor violence, Iguaran said the Fiscalia meets regularly with organized labor to gather information for investigations and prioritize cases. He said Colombia's recent transition to a more efficient, oral accusatory system, accomplished through help from the U.S. Department of Justice, would help to achieve further progress more quickly. The oral accusatory system has already reduced the average trial time from a matter of years to a few months.

¶10. (SBU) Iguaran said the United States has been the greatest friend of justice in Colombia, helping with significant resources and technical assistance. Iguaran pointed out that the International Labor Organization visited Colombia in November and issued a report that praised the government for its implementation to date of the tripartite agreement on labor concerns signed by the Colombian government, labor unions, and industry leaders.

¶11. (SBU) The Secretary noted that the Fiscalia has made extraordinary progress and its efforts deserve recognition. She thanked Iguaran for his efforts to expose the truth and bring human rights violators to justice.

RICE